

Mondale Says Secrets Leak Not Criminal

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Disagreeing with the newly named director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Vice President Mondale said yesterday he is "personally opposed" to the imposition of any criminal penalties on government officials who allow national security secrets to become public.

Mondale said he would support some form of "civil remedies for unauthorized disclosure," but disagreed with the suggestion by Adm. Stansfield Turner, the new CIA director, for criminal penalties on national security leaks.

"I would find it very difficult to accept the system of criminal penalties," Mondale said in an interview with The Washington Post. "I don't think it works and I don't think it should work."

Referring to his study of past abuses by intelligence agencies when he was a member of a Senate investigating committee, Mondale said he had concluded that "the best protection the President has from abuse . . . of his authority by subordinates is the . . . fear that they may be caught and they may read about it in the press."

Mondale was the highest-ranking administration official to discuss the subject of security leaks since Turner told senators at his confirmation hearing that he would "certainly be very amenable" to developing and advocating criminal legislation to stop leaks by security officers.

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The Vice President said he had not discussed the issue with Turner or with President Carter, who said at his last press conference that he believed such leaks could be "extremely damaging."

The discussion was provoked by the publication by The Washington Post of information that the CIA had supplied Jordan's King Hussein with millions of dollars over a period of years for both personal and intelligence uses.

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Mondale, who had previously said he was unaware of those payments when he was a member of the 1975-76 Senate committee investigating the CIA, told Post reporters and editors that his memory may have been mistaken.

"I did not recall hearing about the Hussein thing," he said, "but I have checked since, and I am told that at least the records show that I was at a meeting where that was reported. I just plain don't remember it."

Mondale said he thought "many functions" subsidized through such payments were "perfectly legitimate," but said he was not fully briefed on "the specific grant or whatever you call it" to Hussein.

He said he supported the President's efforts to reduce the number of executive branch employees with access to such information and hoped Congress would reduce the numbers of its members who received such briefings.

Mondale said a reduction in the number of officials given such information could be achieved without damaging the principle of political accountability by the intelligence agencies to the President and Congress.

He also said he would have no objections to dismissal from office or other civil penalties being invoked against officials who violate a pledge of confidentiality on secret materials, but he ruled out criminal penalties of any kind.

In the interview, the Vice President also strongly defended Carter's "human rights" campaign as both effective and principled.

"There have been several examples around the world of political prisoners being released and emigres being permitted to leave," he said. "I think there is evidence that when this country speaks in meaningful, consistent ways about human rights and the people around the world get the idea that we might mean it, there are very desirable reactions in a host of societies."

On domestic issues, Mondale said he thought relations between the new administration and Congress are "Better than the press reports." But he also said Carter "feels very deeply" about the 19 water projects he cut from the budget and might be willing to risk a veto-battle with Congress on the issue.

The President omitted funds for 19

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know how you can get a hold of the budget."

Mondale said Carter "does not want to get into government-by-veto the way we had it . . . under some of the previous Presidents, but that is a remedy that is available if he feels deeply about something."

But, despite this threatened action, Mondale said he thought the "objective criteria" of executive-congressional relations are good. Citing recent victories on reorganization authority, the budget and the economic stimulus package and a series of nominations the Vice President said things are "moving quite well."

He also took an optimistic view of the appointments process, conceding that "it's taken us longer than we expected" to fill departmental posts, but predicting that "two months from now . . . I'm not sure . . . how serious it will be."

The Vice President said there were several reasons for the slowdown in sending nominations to Congress for confirmation.

"We've simply swamped" the FBI with names, he said, slowing the typical clearance period from 10 days to four or five weeks. Strict conflict-of-interest standards have required "a good deal of time" for some nominees to "rearrange their affairs."

The President's desire to give his Cabinet appointees a major voice in staffing their departments and the search for qualified women and minority applicants have also entailed delays, Mondale said.

Finally, "consultations" with members of Congress have often taken "unbelievable amounts of time," he said.

"I was given one particular job . . . and at the end of three weeks I told the President I thought we should abolish the office. No matter who was recommended, there was somebody else that didn't like him."

But, Mondale said, "the tempo is picking up much more rapidly" on appointments, and the problem should diminish.

As for his own role, Mondale said that, despite the problems between past Vice Presidents and Presidents, "President Carter and I get along perfectly as far as I can tell."